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ABSTRACT

A series of three studies looked at argument across significant contexts to understand what students must learn to "argue" in these contexts and carry out their practices. Study 1 involved 19 pre-college minority writers who were asked to take a "rival hypothesis" stance to their source texts that discuss issues in minority education. In study 2, 9 returning women students applied some equally controversial readings to their own lives. Study 3 examined the practice of argument in a community center concerned with issues such as landlord and tenant relations, a situation which often starts with people who already have clear positions but who need to understand other people's arguments. Results indicated that (1) argument is not a unified practice; (2) if argument is understood as a social cognitive process, then argument cannot be reduced to familiar textual forms such as pro and con arguments or thesis and support; and (3) practices such as collaborative planning and reflection can help students move across contexts and practices in a more self-conscious and strategic way, to engage in inquiry, entertain rival perspectives and attempt to negotiate them in text. (Contains 13 references.) (RS)

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FINAL REPORT

THE WRITING OF ARGUMENTS ACROSS DIVERSE CONTEXTS

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FINAL REPORT
PROJECT 8

THE WRITING OF ARGUMENTS ACROSS DIVERSE CONTEXTS

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Research Goals

The goal of this project was to look at argument across significant contexts to understand what students must learn in order to "argue" in these contexts and carry out their practices, and at the same time to study some ways of helping students learn to manage multiple and sometimes competing practices of argument.

This project showed us that learning to write an argument means quite different things in the contexts we study. In Study 1, for example, pre-college minority writers are being asked to take a "rival hypothesis" stance to their source texts that discuss issues in minority education. They need to write an argument that sets up an open question, considers different hypotheses, and evaluates the evidence for those arguments. The key to success is understanding—and questioning—authorities on a topic you are yourself learning about for the first time. When we shift our gaze to advanced students who are putting literacy theory into practice as mentors in a community literacy course, building an argument means not only considering what published sources and authorities say, but recognizing the conflicts among those positions and—through inquiry into your own experience—building a "working theory" that negotiates these differences and builds an argument based on praxis (that is, theory and action).

The literate practice of argument in the Community College in Study 2, however, has a different set of priorities. It asks these returning women students to apply some equally controversial readings to their own lives—to build arguments based in part on their own experience and in part on their readings. However, the college Review Board which also has to pass these essays, tends to reward a simple, clear organization based on a single claim. For these inexperienced writers, it is often hard to meet these valuable goals of simplicity, clarity, and correctness at the same time they are attempting to meet the request to think deeply and personally in writing about hard issues. So this practice of argument, like many in the real world, is a complex one to carry out and to learn. In Study 3, the practice of argument in a community center concerned with issues such as landlord and tenant relations often starts with people who already have clear positions but who need to understand other people's arguments not to "win" the argument or reach a conclusion for themselves, but to reach a consensus with each other. A "good" argument

looks very different in each of these contexts because as a literate practice it is both a social act (adapted to its social situation) and a cognitive process (that involves different thinking strategies).

Looking across these contexts, we wanted to know how educators could help student learn this multifaceted skill of argument. And in asking this question, we focused on the related issues of inquiry and intercultural collaboration as issues of particular concern. Here the study took a more exploratory tack as we more precisely asked, how could the practice of argument—or what practices—could work as tools for inquiry and for inquiry-based intercultural collaboration.

Observations

This study of argument supports three conclusions.

1. Argument is not a unified practice. It takes different forms; therefore learning to build an argument demands different skills and practices in particular contexts. This means that when people move across these settings, they bring a variety of argument practices with them—practices which may be in conflict with one another. For the individual writer these differences translate into "voices" that guide composing, problem solving. Learning to write arguments across contexts means that writers must often not only learn new strategies, new moves, and alternative goals, but negotiate the conflict among these new moves and the ones they already know from experience, other schooling, other classes, or other disciplines. To learn to argue is not to develop a single, multi-purpose skill; instead students must interpret new practices, see the overlap with old, transfer what is appropriate, and deal productively with conflict and difference.

2. If we understand argument as a social cognitive process, it becomes clear that it can not be reduced to familiar textual forms such as pro and con arguments or thesis and support. Argument is an act of case building that is based on a fundamental process of inquiry into the meaning of claims and the basis for conclusions. Moreover, because argument and inquiry are social acts of inquiry, they require writers to recognize multiple perspectives and to entertain, even generate rival hypotheses. This is especially critical when one enters intercultural contexts. As a cognitive act, argument then requires individual writers to consider (even generate) multiple voices, values, assumptions, positions and to deal with them in text.

3. Practices such as Collaborative Planning and reflection can help students move across contexts and practices in a more self-conscious and strategic way, to engage in inquiry, entertain rival perspectives and attempt to negotiate them in text. This strategic approach to differing practices of

argument and inquiry seems to be of particular value in helping writers negotiate meaning across cultural differences.

OBSERVATION 1. ARGUMENT IS NOT A UNIFIED PRACTICE

When Aristotle defined argument as a way of "discovering the available means of support," he was describing a process of inquiry that is conducted by case building, using argument to test the validity of an idea. We focus here on two defining features of such argument: its attention to rival hypotheses and its demand for evidence. This form of argument as inquiry can be described in three quite different ways. First and most broadly, it can be seen as both an attitude and strategic approach to inquiry that seems to cross disciplinary boundaries, that is claimed by groups across the university as a hallmark of thinking in philosophy, biology, psychology, rhetoric. Its dedicated search for rival explanations and evidence is a widely shared stance toward difficult, open questions. Seen in context, however, this apparently generic process dissolves and resolves itself into a set of distinctive practices differentially adapted for needs in scientific and humanistic inquiry as well as education. It seems, in fact, to operate as a diverse set of locally and historically situated literate practices—a loose knit family answering to a common name. However, if we move in for a still closer inspection in education, this picture of unified, conventional social practices which students try to imitate or enter begins to give way as well. As we shall see, the various versions of argument students encounter do not exist as well-formed templates to follow, but as practices learners construct when, in the face of considerable conflict, they must negotiate a body of competing goals, strategies, and resources attached to that practice. Likewise, each of these levels of description—the shared stance, the literate practice, and the negotiated meaning—offer a set of alternatives we as educators must negotiate as well.

Argument As a Literate Practice

When we begin to examine how the attitudes, strategies and goals identified with the broad version of argument are instantiated in context, what stands out is not a generic, interdisciplinary process but a family of localized, often quite distinctive social practices, more precisely, literate practices. As Scribner and Cole's definition suggests, embedding argument in literate practices governs when, why, and how the process is used.

By a practice we mean a recurrent, goal-directed sequence of activities using a particular technology and particular system of knowledge. We use the term "skills" to refer to the coordinated sets of actions involved in applying this knowledge in particular settings. A practice, then, consists of three components: technology, knowledge, and skills. . . . applying [reading

and writing] for specific purposes in specific contexts of use (Scribner & Cole, 1981, p. 236)

For instance, when psychologists build an argument by examining rival hypotheses, they are engaged in a well-codified literate practice guided by the express purpose of smoking out potential threats to the validity or reliability of their results. This argument practice makes sense within the community of social science in which researchers evaluate, then cite, build on, or dispute previous work, trying in turn to influence other researchers or users (in policy, education, management). It presumes not only the technology for the timely circulation and public evaluation of studies, but also the skills its readers will possess in reading graphs, charts, examining data, and interpreting statistical claims. Moreover, the technology, supporting knowledge, and necessary skills that support this particular practice reflect the social history—the purposes and literate strategies of previous researchers.

When we look at argument as a family of literate practices some interesting new features emerge.

- Literate practices emerge as a goal-directed response to a social situation and people's needs. Practices have histories that adapt argument to their purposes.

- Over time, these practices develop conventions which shape the way argument is carried out in text and in talk.

- The interdisciplinary family of literate practices that promote argument as a tool for inquiry is also a site of generative conflict. Disciplines and specialties promote competing models for inquiry that value and use argument in distinctive ways, embedding it in an array of literate practices. This creates an interesting situation for students who are likely to encounter argument in various places, in the midst of these competing practices, among an array of conflicting conventions.

The Social Sources of Practices: A Case in Point.

Bazerman's history of the rise of the scientific article illustrates the way argument operated within the social context of seventeenth century science and became transformed into the literate practices of the experimental report. At the point his story takes up, the key features of doing and reporting science were shaped by the growing pressure of rival observations, claims and interpretations (Bazerman, 1988, p. 78). The genre of the scientific report developed over time (1665-1880) in the *Transactions of the Royal Society*, as a rhetorical response to the context of that rapidly developing, individualistic, and often contentious community. The early volumes were taken up with

reports of natural phenomena or cookbook recipes for producing fascinating effects with vacuums and chemicals. But as writers began reporting actual experiments and readers of this epistolary journal began to respond with conflicting opinions and reports, the conventions for reporting methods emerged as a response to misunderstanding and a defense against attack. Bazerman explained, "As disputes arise over reported results, writers become more careful about reporting what they see, and measurement takes a greater role" (p. 72). Although new ways of reporting eventually became conventionalized, they began as a direct response to the social situation of writing: "debate and conflict push results to greater detail and precision in exactly the same articles with more detailed accounts of methods" (ibid). The convention of an introduction that sets up a general problem began to emerge under the same conditions: "as experiments begin to respond to conflicts, their reports focus on the issue in contention . . . . with a statement of the phenomenon in dispute and then a discussion of the opponent's work or position" (p. 76). Over this period, the genre that emerged and its formal features were "the linguistic/symbolic solution to a problem in social interaction" (p. 62).

Conventions like those already mentioned play a large role both in linking thought to text and in solving social problems. How, for instance, does one combat the competitiveness inherent in a science advanced by rival claims and promote cooperation and cumulative knowledge? In Priestley's 1767 landmark work on electricity, we can also see the beginning of "textual mechanisms needed . . . to coordinate the work and emerging perceptions of researchers widely dispersed temporally, geographically, and theoretically" (Bazerman, 1991, p. 16). "Mechanisms" that soon became textual conventions included a comprehensive review of the literature, a list of generalizations emerging from that communal history, and a list of open questions for future research. Another acute problem for these scientists was the danger of prematurely discarding possibilities: in the face of "so many cases of at first implausible results later accepted as common knowledge [Priestly] is chary to exclude any result" and finds a textual solution in the convention of objective documentation of the fields' accumulated experience, delusions and all, to be judged by the evidence of the fact (Bazerman, 1991, p. 23).

Competing Practices of Inquiry: The Role of Rivals

Describing argument as a shared stance seems to hold out the possibility of a Peaceable Kingdom of inquiry in which a generic process, built on posing open questions and rival hypotheses, supports the scholar's goal of advancing disciplinary knowledge. But once we begin to tell a story of argument in terms of its socially situated literate practices we entered a contested territory in which disciplinary modes of inquiry often compete with one another and in which alternative versions of argument merge in the literate practices of scientists and educators.

The Problem with the Idea of Practice

Having hoisted the flag of practice, we need to acknowledge at the outset that there is a problem with the very notion of studying a literate practice. To do so assumes that such a creature actually exists. In fact, there are good reasons to be skeptical about the notion of practice, even as we celebrate the power of this notion to redefine literacy, not as features of text, but as a way people use writing in socially systematized ways to do something in the world. When Scribner and Cole defined a practice in the following terms, they were arguing that we couldn't understand literacy by looking at texts, but needed to look at people using writing.

In their account literacy is not the intellectual watershed that divides oral and literate, primitive and civilized societies (Scribner & Cole, 1981, p. 4). It is a very situated array of things Vai farmers do (writing stylized personal letters, keeping records of crops, kinship and debts) and Liberian school children do (following instructions and writing essays). Literacy is also the distinctive set of thinking strategies each group develops (such as the skill in free recall and solving logic problems that is required by western schools, but not by Vai or Qur'anic literacy). A literate practice is a set of purposeful activities Vai farmers or school children carry out with text—"socially developed and patterned ways of using technology and knowledge to accomplish tasks" (Scribner & Cole, 1981, p. 236).

Soon, however, in the fashion of academic practice, we find it convenient to collapse this array of textual moves, thinking strategies, situations, and motives, to categorize and name. And soon we ignore the messy variation of what Vai farmers do and see only as the generalized *practice* we have named into being (a move encouraged in our essayist literacy).

We can see both the power and some of the problem with this idea of practice in James Gee's persuasive discussion of capital "D" Discourses—as "*saying(writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing combinations*" (Gee, 1989, p. 6).

> A Discourse is a sort of "identity kit" which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular role that others will recognize. Being "trained" as a linguist meant that I learned to speak, think, and act like a linguist, and to recognize others when they do so" (Gee, 1989, p. 7).

Because a Discourse is a way of being, "if you have no access to the social practice, you don't get in the discourse, you don't have it" (Gee, 1989, p.

7). The Discourse of being an administrator, board room executive, professor, or factory worker is not "learned" Gee argues, but acquired like language by growing up in it or through long-term social apprenticeship. As a result, many people are barred from "true acquisition" or full fluency in Discourses associated with University or professional life. The mythically proportioned barriers of Gee's Discourses create insiders, outsiders, and pretenders. If you don't belong, the only good option is to self-consciously resist or to fake it.

The problem here is that once we begin to reify the notion of discourse into Discourse, it like literate practices becomes an "it" and the concept, not the experience it describes becomes the object of our attention and talk. We soon construct even more refined images of archetypical Discourses, that emerge as idealized, stable practices. We can now say that people approximate the Discourse, treating its patterns as though they were the rules of a grammar and evaluating behavior as we would performance in a foreign language for its fit to the rules of usage. The Discourse begins to take on the status of an object or place or club; we can talk about people entering it, getting initiated into it, getting shut out of it. Perhaps most important, the Discourse now begins to take on agency, dictating behavior, determining who is in or out, who makes it in the social system. Gee's position, working on the analogy of a foreign language, goes so far as to assert that it is almost impossible to "enter" a Discourse unless you were born to it or go through a lengthy apprenticeship, because "entry" is measured by never making any moves someone could recognize as non-native. And yet, by this standard, who of us would pass? Exactly what are the rules, say, for doing the Professor Discourse?

This argument does a good job of explaining how corporate and educational establishments use literacy as a gatekeeping device, by stigmatizing literate practices associated with Black English Vernacular or with certain gender roles. But it doesn't constitute evidence for the initial premise in this linguistic argument—that there is a coherent, identifiable Discourse that acts as an agent and is there to be acquired.

For all the power of this concept, its limitations become more significant, when instead of talking about it, we want to teach people to go beyond faking and we need to be more explicit about these seemingly rigid but tacit rules. How do you teach a practice whose features become ambiguous the minute you attempt to state them? Is there really, for instance, a common Discourse all professors possess and graduate students need to acquire? Have we stated the educational problem correctly as entry into a capital "D" Discourse, Discipline, or reified literate Practice?

Is it really a Discourse we need to discover (but are always unable to state or teach); does this unwritten system exist primarily on the pages of our academic journals? What if the object of our research were not the elusive

object, a Discourse, but a set of quite conditional but highly integrated ways people read literate situations and use an array of small "d" discourse strategies?

Wrestling with Reification: Or What to Do with Variability

This tension between the idealizing, reifying, nominalizing moves of academic discourse and the local realities of literate practice is at issue in different ways in anthropology, sociolinguistics, psychology, rhetoric. Is the everyday stream of discourse we observe a parade of unified, distinct Discourses, or is it the dance of mutable, locally situated practices? In search of more abstract accounts of Practices and Discourses theorists turn the evidence of literate performances and processes into taxonomies, categories, and notions of generalizable cognitive competencies. The mounting critique of such taxonomies and categorical descriptions, however, charges that as we imagine into being a unified image of a Practice (or genre, a discourse, a linguistic code) our theories wipe out all the complicating diversity of performance within the practice, the conflicting moves it contains, and the agency of speakers working within that practice.

Clifford Geertz (1973) lays out the problem with exceptional clarity describing the school of anthropology in which describing culture is an exercise in "writing out of systematic rules, an ethnographic algorithm" of native behavior in the form of "taxonomies, paradigms, tables, trees" (p. 11). One is encouraged to imagine culture (like the literate practices we would understand) as a "self-contained 'super-organic' reality with forces and purposes of its own; that is, to reify it" (p. 11). In this developing system of theoretical and scientific analysis, anthropology finds itself at one more remove from its object of study, and "the line between (Moroccan) culture as a natural fact and (Moroccan) culture as a theoretical entity tends to get blurred. In short, one loses sight of the fact that "anthropological writings are themselves interpretations, and second and third order ones to boot" (p. 15).

If this drive to abstraction leads anthropology to create theoretical fictions, it also loses something in the hermetical process. In this approach culture is treated "purely as a symbolic system, . . by isolating its elements, specifying internal relationships among those elements, and then characterizing the whole system in some general way—according to the core symbols around which it is organized. . . . [However,] this hermetical approach to things seems to me to run the danger (and increasingly to have been overtaken by it) of locking cultural analysis away from its proper object, the informal logic of actual life" (p. 17).

The question becomes, is a literate practice (or a culture) an It? How do we interpret often enormous variability and individual difference wrapped in the blanket of our categories? If, to change the metaphor, terms such as

Culture and Discourse tend to obscure another level of meaningful actions, what should a more situated account of a literate practice (such as like argument) try to do?

In sociolinguistics this debate hinges on individual performance. The rules of generative grammar, for instance, are designed to account for Chompsky's "ideal speakers living in ideally uniform communities," but, as it turns out, these rules seem to bear little relation to the performance observed in actual communities (Gumperz, 1982, p. 19). More recently, linguists in quantitative sociolinguistics and functionalist theory use social survey data to predict individual behavior. But to do so they must rely on large *a priori* assumptions about shared and generalizable patterns of linguistic knowledge. The choice to make such assumptions stands "at the core of the debate between order theorists, who argue that social norms and categories pre-exist, and individual behavior and conflict or action theorists, who see human behavior as constitutive of social reality" (Gumperz, 1982, p. 26). For order theorists, members of a speech community typically vary in their beliefs and behavior, but "such variation, which seems irregular when observed at the level of the individual, nevertheless shows systematic regularities at the statistical level of social facts." Language usage can be seen as "simply a matter of conforming to norms of appropriateness" (Gumperz, 1982, p. 24).

However, researchers like Gumperz are calling into question "the assumption that speech communities, defined as functionally integrated social systems with shared norms of evaluating, can actually be isolated" (Gumperz, 1982, p. 26). In the face of incontrovertible variability among speakers of minority dialects, radically different stories of school success and failure despite the same language background, "social scientists of many persuasions are now questioning the very basis of traditional ethnic and social categories." The closer look of ethnographic analysis argues that language use is less a matter of conforming to norms and more "a way of conveying information about values, beliefs and attitudes" in every day situations in which participants must infer meaning. Gumperz introduces his work on situated discourse strategies and flexible code switching with a challenge to go beyond pigeonholes and reified linguistic categories. "There is a need for a sociolinguistic theory which accounts for communicative functions of linguistics' variability and for its relations to speakers' goals without reference to untestable functionalist assumptions about conformity or nonconformance to closed systems of norms" (Gumperz, 1982, p. 29). We need a theory that is based on interaction.

Gumperz research in discourse strategies in the early 1980's challenged the adequacy of idealized linguistic categories, statistical abstractions, and generalized rules and trends. His interpretive approach, grounded in the empirical observations of actual conversations, focused on participants

interactive strategies vis-a-vis one another, on their ability to switch codes, manipulate expectations, and violate norms. This inquiry into the assumptions and strategies of speakers—especially those who are speaking across speech communities helped sociolinguistics account for the human ability to contextualize the production and interpretation of discourse.

Geertz sounds a lot like Gumperz when he defines the proper object of cultural analysis as "the informal logic of actual life" (Geertz, 1973, p. 17). His essay, subtitled "Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," describes the ethnographer as reading a "multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon and knotted into one another" (p. 10). The analyst's goal is not to reduce this tangle of interacting codes and people to a simpler map of cultural codes (here we might substitute linguist codes or literate practices). It is to understand "the imaginative universe in which their acts are signs" (p. 10). And yet theory building demands well-articulated concepts that can be held up to the light of explicit canons of assessment.

> The whole point of a semiotic approach to culture is as I have said, to aid us in gaining access to the conceptual world in which our subjects live so that we can, in some extended sense of the term, converse with them.

The tension between this "need to grasp and the need to analyze" which advances theory is irremovable, especially for Geertz who expects scientific accountability from his field. Nevertheless, the "first condition for cultural theory" is its fidelity to that conceptual world of others:

> It is not its own master. . . . What generality it contrives to achieve grows out of the delicacy of its distinctions, not the sweep of its abstractions (p. 25). Cultural analysis is (or should be) guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses, not discovering the Continent of Meaning and mapping out its bodiless landscape (p. 20).

Both Geertz and Gumperz put this problem of variability at the core of their own disciplinary debates arguing not just for empirical, ethnographic methods that won't wipe out diversity but for theories that recognize the interactive strategic nature of human performance within a culture, a discourse, or a literate practice.

Argument as a Negotiated Practice Students Must Construct

In this series of studies, we represent argument as a situated social and cognitive practice. We hope to build an account that does justice to individual variability and the logic of a students' performance by describing

the practices students *construct* rather than *enter* and by uncovering the conflicts they negotiate in doing so.

This perspective allows us to develop three observations:

1. A literate practice like argument is not a unified set of canonical features, much less a simple set of text features.

The recent sociocognitive arguments about genre make a similar point (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1993). Genres are dynamic because they emerge as a "recurrent rhetorical response" to a recurring situation, that is, to a situation people perceive as a "recurrence" (Miller, 1984). Certain features gain core status because on the one hand they are reinforced by the situation, and on the other they help structure responses to new situations. Even genre features, which might appear to be the stable, textually-grounded aspects of a practice are a sociocognitive act of communication. Because genres, like literate practices more generally, are grounded in situations, they are a dynamic rhetorical form. The conventions of the scientific article not only developed over time from Royal Society correspondence (Bazerman, 1991), but, like the reporting of qualitative data, vary with the local context of a journal or a disciplinary subgroup.

Argument is a good example of a widely distributed, hence highly variable literate practice. It is best described not as a convention, but as an array of available (sometimes even conflicting) goals and textual, rhetorical, and social moves. The collocation of moves and goals that a writer uses will depend not only on the situation (evaluating a social science experiment versus arguing for social change), but on strategic choices one makes within that situation.

2. When the practice(s) of argument are treated as a mode of inquiry, it involves a deliberate attempt to consider, even embrace competing meanings. It pushes writers (speakers, thinkers) into the act of constructing a negotiated meaning. Argument is a process of self-conscious meaning making that deliberately evokes competing perspectives, calling them up as conflicting voices into the process of interpretation.

Negotiated construction, we should be clear, does not refer to any act of interpretation. In some sense of the term, of course, all meaning is "negotiated," that is, all meaning is shaped by multiple forces that direct perception, focus attention, activate schemas, set priorities, or provide language. Negotiation, as we are using the term, enters meaning making at those points when 1) the forces shaping meaning come in conflict, and 2) the thinker/writer rises to a conscious awareness of conflict and attempts to entertain this conflict in the act of constructing meaning (Flower, 1994). In a given constructive act, competing goals, values, ideologies, perceptions,

language can be described as voices, urging writers to respond in different ways. Negotiation turns conscious attention to such voices and creates, in one way or another, a provisional resolution in the face of conflict.

Creating a negotiated meaning can be an intellectually and psychically demanding process. Perhaps that is why in our studies of writers, these acts of sustained negotiation are special events. Argument appears to be a literate practice which in its various ways codifies, structures, and sustains a process of active negotiation with competing voices.

3. Finally, we will argue that argument—as a mode of inquiry—not only promotes an actively negotiated constructive process, but the process of learning the practice is itself a constructive act. We do not mean this just in the soft sense of the word that is sometimes used in reading research in which a reader (typically a student) successfully "constructs" an interpretation which correctly approximates the content and organization of the target text as interpreted by a teacher or evaluator. We saw a far more independent, unpredictable, and variable process in which students constructed a version of this practice in their talk and writing which was adapted to their situation, their values, their needs and priorities. The learning we saw could not be adequately described as "approximating" but was a vigorous constructive act, creating a set of moves and goals adapted to the situation—a composition assignment, a history course, a mentor/writer dialogue. As educators we were quite prepared to say that most of these students were learning to do argument, but it would be a stretch of the taxonomic imagination to say they were learning or doing the same thing. We are willing to say that they are indeed "taking on the discourse" of argument, but the discourse is not an "it" so much as a family of conditionalized, situated constructions, which will be expanded (in the next situation in which these writers take this stance) by another situated construction—by a cousin rather than a repetition.

And with this observation we will return to concerns of educators. What does it mean for liberal and disciplinary education if students are indeed learning cross-disciplinary literate practices—modes of strategic thinking that are valued in science, history, writing, medicine, community service. And yet, what they are learning is not a conveniently unified "it" but an individual, situated construction of that practice. Three questions:

How then can educators help shape this process so that students construct a robust rather than limited version of this practice in a given setting?

How can (and how do) students make the transition across settings? How do they renegotiate and reconstruct their own knowledge of a literate practice

And finally, once we acknowledge there is no "it" that will conveniently "transfer" to other settings, how can education support a reflective self-consciousness about such practices, that lets students adapt in the best sense of liberal learning?

OBSERVATION 2. ARGUMENT DEPENDS ON THE NEGOTIATION OF COMPETING VOICES.

The social and cognitive demands of building an argument based on inquiry clearly take us beyond the world of instantiating a textual formula for thesis and support. But as our work shows, students are also doing more than learning to imitate disciplinary patterns (Bartholomae, 1988). Argument and inquiry involves students in listening to multiple and often conflicting "voices," which can include not only ideas, positions, evidence and discourse conventions, but values goals, and assumptions. And potential for difference and conflict among such voices is even greater when argument crosses cultural boundaries.

Our study of-argument writing across contexts build a portrait of how active conflict and negotiation in each of these settings creates a logic that is indeed shaping writing in ways teachers need to understand. At the same time, these studies yield a highly local, situated account of the particular issues different writers struggle with. These studies reveal some of the conflicting voices to which these writers are attending. And they show some of the reasonable, if also problematic, ways students try to negotiate this constructive process. This focus on the logic of learners also points out the challenges the we believe educators must consider in teaching argument. Consider the following cases in point from our research.

Case in Point: Returning Women Students Negotiating Competing Schemas for Discourse

The context for argument. This study examined the practice of argument in a community college class of returning women students. These nine non-traditional students brought significant life experience in constructing written arguments to addressed institutions, social agencies, the legal system. However, the academic argument privileged in this required course called for different patterns of reasoning and was complicated by the (sometimes conflicting) expectations of the teacher, an external review board, and the other members of the class (Higgins, 1992).

Patterns of conflict and negotiation. We observed that:

- The non-traditional students in this study do indeed use written argument in their non-academic lives, however because such arguments typically depend on external factual evidence or "proofs," this experience did

not prepare writers to produce the warrants and extended reasoning expected in their college class.

Although students and the review board share a number of criteria (e.g., appropriate use of organizational conventions), the matrix of goals and strategies constructed for both groups shows that students are bringing a number of potent additional goals which involve influencing certain readers or examining issues in their own lives.

- These students are often aware that certain personal goals are at odds with their strategies for managing school writing. For example, students' own ideas and discoveries about the topic of racism interfere with their ability to write a well-organized and conventionally supported paper based on source texts. Yet few students have strategies for making their own path of personal reasoning explicit in a text.

- Students negotiate these conflicts in different ways, which include abandoning their ideas for the goal of producing a manageable paper. This study suggests that teachers need to confront these conflicts more directly in their teaching. Given the reasoning we see in students planning, but not in their papers, it also suggests that these students need to be shown strategies for laying out their reasoning *in text*, as an alternative to the more standard practice of "finding" evidence and support from outside authorities.

This study with returning women in a community college program shows students attempting to negotiate the conflicting demands of a review board (concerned primarily with textual features of correctness and organization), the goals of this particular class (encouraging them to use writing to explore significant life issues), and the demands of this new genre of academic argument (which differs significantly from the written argumentative discourse they are used to using with social service, legal, and medical institutions). Students often realize that, given their developing skill with this new genre, they can not meet all of these goals in a single text. The study shows with special clarity, how students need help negotiating this critical conflict. In particular, they need help in transforming the logic of their own experience into the more explicit statements of reasons and inferences academic argument demands.

Case in Point: Negotiating Academic Discourse

The Context for Argument. As part of a pre-college program for minority students admitted to the university, the 19 students in this freshman course read conflicting authorities on issues in minority education and were asked to write arguments which defined an open question and took a rival hypothesis stance to that question, that is, a stance that considered

genuine alternative hypotheses or different perspectives on the problem and the evidence for them before coming to a resolution.

Patterns of conflict and negotiation. We observed that:

• Analysis of the texts showed that students appear to have difficulty (1) generating genuine rival hypotheses (as opposed to simply asserting a claim or thesis), and (2) presenting adequate evidence to evaluate any of their claims.

• However, this study went on the ask: what problems are students themselves actively negotiating and how do they represent this learning task? Transcripts of students' planning and reflection tapes were analyzed for "problem episodes" defined as a cluster of comments in which the writer recognized a difficulty, conflict or uncertainty about what to do or the partner raises a problem or conflict. Negotiation of a given problem or conflict might appear in multiple places across the transcript, however reliability of nearly 80% in identifying the 3 to 8 problem clusters typical of most students, suggests that this unit of activity is an identifiable one, even if the problems themselves resist simple naming or interpretation. A matrix sketching each problem and any planned resolutions was constructed for each writer, relying on the student's own language to retain the complexity of the issue at this level of analysis.

• The categorization of these conflicts suggests that students are indeed devoting active problem solving to generating evidence and understanding the assignment criteria—that is, students are attending to issues teachers assume they should/would be negotiating based on the task and typical texts. For example, in conflicts over evidence (which occur in about half the sample), many planning partners assume college argument requires formal evidence, but when source texts fail to provide it, they debate over how (and whether) to use their own experience and reasoning effectively to support claims.

• However, this process analysis also suggests that much of students' problem solving is devoted to other problems the teachers did not anticipate, do not see, and do not address in their teaching or comments. For example, many active conflicts (for at least half the students) center on the social/ rhetorical/political context students imagine to be surrounding this argument, on their images of the motives of the authorities they read, and on where they as African American students at a selective university stand in this larger discussion. Students' response to these "unseen" issues appear to shape their text more directly than do the apparently less salient "assigned" problems (such as developing rival hypotheses). Understanding the conflicts students are actively negotiating in such argument promises to expand the image of this literate practice, to yield more accurate diagnoses of a class of problems

students do struggle with, and to let us focus instruction in argument on those points of conflict where active learning is most likely to occur.

- The key categories of conflict we observed involve:

1. The assignment
2. The need for evidence
3. The student's sense of identity in relation to both the topic and the task and the readings
4. The student's attempt to construct an interpersonal, rhetorical context for writing.

The collaborative planning data and interviews with freshmen minority students writing on issues of minority students and education, show how conflicts over the use of evidence (an issue the teacher expected and encouraged students to confront) do, indeed, affect their writing. However, two other conflicts—over their own identity and over their rhetorical stance as minority students challenging establishment sources—were also significant conflicts for writers, and choosing to negotiate these issues often lead to a logic behind students' writing in which it appeared as though they were "failing" to meet some assignment demands, when in fact, they were choosing to negotiate a different, more compelling problem.

Case in Point: Developing an Argument within an Intercultural Community

The Context for Argument. This study shifts focus to a community setting in which members of an inner-city neighborhood are, like the students, using writing to respond to a controversial issue in a way that recognizes multiple viewpoints as well as the writers' own positions. The writers at Pittsburgh's Community Literacy Center were part of a Landlords and Tenants project in which the members of a multicultural writing group representing both groups met to construct a Memorandum of Understanding that would present a strong statement of the problem as seen from each perspective, and at the same time offer guidance to both landlords and tenants (Higgins, Flower, & Deems, in press).

Patterns of conflict and negotiation. We observed that:

- Collaborative planning played an important role in shaping how people attended to the multiple perspectives in this discussion. According to the participants, discussions about the ongoing landlord and tenant disputes in inner-city neighborhoods are typically highly adversarial or based on a rhetoric of complaint and blame. This study brought an educational approach to this discussion, using the strategy of collaborative planning and its focus on writing to support community literacy in a non-traditional, out-of-school setting. As participants alternated among the roles

of planner and supporter, collaborative planning helped transform what is typically described as an oppositional process of advocacy into a collaborative process focused on creating a written Memo of Understanding. Members of the group not only commented on this how the process altered the dynamics of discussion from what they were used to; they were committed enough to the process to volunteer extra sessions to complete their document and to continue in a second phase that produced a formal document now used by housing groups in the city.

• However, the study also showed some ways participants' attempts to build consensual arguments and collaborative texts can falter. In tracing the points of conflict and negotiation in these discussion, one striking pattern was the sequence in which the group comes to premature agreement over a concept, apparently believing they have found a spot of accord. However, our analysis based on interviews and the discussion up to that point, showed that each member in fact holds a very different set of meanings and goals associated with that concept—differences which would later surface as conflict. Furthermore, these differences were in some sense "non-negotiable" in that they reflect the reality of the problem from a landlord or tenants' perspective—realities these participants were charged to represent in this community discussion

• Many theories of argument focus on the need for persuasion to lead to consensus and agreement. However, in this case the need to produce a text moves people not to agreement *per se*, but to constructive action. It led to a process of deliberation that forced them to find a form of *literate action* upon which they could all agree. The written document the community members designed reflects this way of negotiating conflict. Organized in a two part structure around problem scenarios (describing problems from the viewpoint of all participants) and a "what if" discussion of alternatives and solutions, the document let the group maintain different, often conflicting, values and perspectives, but come to consensus through action. And in this case the action was a written document.

• Finally, in this group the document itself becomes a hybrid text, incorporating multiple genres, discourses, voices, and positions. Although people do not change their perspectives on the problem itself (as traditional views of argument might expect) they are able to construct a text that negotiates their conflicts and finds a place in which different people—landlords, tenants, community developers—can stand.

OBSERVATION 3. INSTRUCTIONAL SCAFFOLDING CAN HELP STUDENTS NEGOTIATE CONFLICTING VOICES

The results of the studies sketched above support some conclusions about the nature of learning to engage in inquiry-based argument.

1. Learning in these contexts means, among other things, facing genuine conflicts, dealing with the "good problems" of negotiating multiple voices

2. Students are trying to meet the multiple goals of their composition courses in the act of writing. In the pre-college class, for instance, students are dealing with textual expectations for evidence, teacher's expectations for rival hypothesis thinking, the goals of their summer program focused on helping minority students locate a sense of self and recognize the problems of community. They are also reaching toward some impressive higher level goals of writing as they attempt to see their text as part of rhetorical situation, and to locate themselves in the discourse

3. However, conflict often arises among these multiple, and demanding goals as students attempt to carry them out in text. When the need to take a strong stand on an issue of identity, for instance, takes priority, the need for a strong thesis will also take precedence, washing out the goal of posing an open question and entertaining serious rivals.

4. The teacher who evaluates the text in light of the assignment criteria only sees part of the problem and may not have access to the logic of the learner. The teacher may mistake a case of negotiation among valuable competing goals as evidence of an inability or resistance. But in our example the source of the problem is not the student needs more practice, more examples, etc. Rather, it is that a pressing rhetorical problem has superseded the other legitimate goals the student was asked to entertain.

Our work suggests a path of response to dealing with these problems of conflict and negotiation writing and learning poses.

1. Teach to the conflicts: Teachers need to deal with problems students are confronting. Using strategies like collaborative planning which support classroom inquiry lets teachers see more of the logic of the learner.

2. Support negotiation: Instructional activities like collaborative planning bring decisions and conflicts up into active negotiation. When a partner helps the writer talk things through and plans get articulated, conflicts and challenges are more likely to be addressed.

3. Encourage reflection: Strategies that let students track their own writing process help them to recognize their moves, decisions and options.

Our final study examined the results of just such an educational intervention.

Case in Point: Mentors Negotiating Intercultural Images of Literacy

Context for Argument. This study tracked the work of more advanced undergraduates over the course of a semester, building academic arguments in which they, too, were trying to incorporate their reading from sources with their own experience. In this case the issue was literacy and intercultural collaboration and students spent half of the course in an inner-city community literacy center, where they worked as writing mentors helping urban, African-American teenagers produce a text on a community issue. Because the course assumed that learning would involve the conjunction and possible conflicts of academic theory and practical experience, it supported students' reflection through group reflection meetings, weekly electronic bulletin board posts, final course projects, and through a series of six "oral journal entries." (These latter audio-taped self-interviews provided the major source data for this analysis) (Long, 1994).

Patterns of conflict and negotiation. We observed that:

- Mentor's self-interviews revealed that students were engaging in sustained reflection over issues posed by the course (based on an analysis of conflict episodes [coded at 83.5% reliability] in which the student engaged in a sustained [multi-clause] consideration of a problem or conflict that was currently unresolved in the student's mind). The conflicts students were encountering in their experience as mentors were in many ways parallel to the competing claims that were at issue in the educational literature. For example, should mentors be passing on their expertise (more like a tutor) or be supporting the thinking and expression of their writer? Should they be supporting the use of Black English Vernacular or teaching Standard Written English? And how should they deal with their own position of power and the authority of their knowledge?

- In these conflict episodes students wrestled not just with immediate problems but competing claims for literate social action and alternative practices for supporting it. Some claims were explicitly referenced theoretical positions—the voices of theorists, such as Lyotard or Freire, whom students had encountered in their college coursework and who are also part of the larger disciplinary debate over literate social action more generally. Other such claims included competing definitions of literacy from the public debate (e.g., in current political campaigns, for instance, or public service announcements); still others were assumptions about what constitutes good writing and effective teaching that had been supported through years of schooling.

- What is perhaps most significant here is that students were not simply attempting to translate disciplinary positions or public arguments into action as they moved from the classroom to their hands-on literacy

experience. Rather, they were *negotiating* the competing positions and conflicts that they confronted by articulating competing voices, conditionalizing them in light of other voices, and reaching provisional resolutions in order to chart courses of action for themselves as mentors. For instance, wrestling with competing images of literacy, several mentors struggled to understand and balance the value of various literacies. Given cross-cultural tensions, one mentor focused on relationship-building to minimize conflicts while another juggled competing priorities in the face of these tensions. Through reflection, students made situated judgments in order to chart courses of action that would be accountable to multiple strong arguments, as well as real world pressures, strong values, and organizational commitments.

• In this process we saw students working to construct *working theories* in which the abstractions and the more polar positions found in the literature (and in their own initial assumptions) were transformed into more conditionalized, qualified, and situated working theories of literacy and of intercultural collaboration.

The study suggests criteria for intellectually rigorous action and reflection. It is not the case that mere "involvement" ensured that mentors approached their hands-on experiences with literacy with rigorous engagement. Instead, the study suggests the college students were strengthening their own literacy learning to the extent that they:

- **explored intercultural working relationships for writing** (i.e., ventured out of what Louise Pratt calls the "contact zone" to see cultural difference as a resource for collaboration).

- **deliberated over alternative claims regarding literate social action** (i.e., actively attended to alternative arguments for how literacy is linked to social action, as well as to the complicated problems of how to support individually and collectively).

- **engaged in observation-based inquiry** (i.e., took a systematic, self-questioning, observational-based stance toward judgments and reflections).

- **built cases to account for problems and to justify judgments and actions** (i.e., developed arguments to explain problems, as well as to justify the internal decisions they make and deliberate actions).

- **took inventive and purposeful rhetorical action** (i.e., charted courses of action amidst competing arguments for what to do and why to do it).

The study suggests that innovative, "hands-on" educational opportunities support students' active literacy learning to the extent that these activities offer students the tools, structure, impetus, and support for actively reflecting on the problems they encounter and actions they take in the face of these conflicts.

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